



SOCIOPOLITICAL SYNDROME IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to explore the themes surrounding Nayantara Sahgal's personal and political history through her earlier works, which weave together the past of individual lives with the historical past of India. It is always acknowledged that politics is a component of society. Her uncle's insights into global history had an impact on her. Her historical and political consciousness informed her works. Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Graham Greene are among the authors who have influenced her. Nehru's diplomatic foreign policy is the novel's high point. She uses a variety of political life aspects to seamlessly merge the personal and the political. She places emphasis on the humanistic principles she adheres to, and the story turns into an examination of life quality. Her stories possess a warm, intimate quality.

KEYWORDS: Socio-Political, Syndrome, Political Consciousness

INTRODUCTION

It has been acknowledged that Nayantara Sahgal is the first Indian woman to write an English-language novel addressing political concerns. Her books openly reflect the political themes of modern India. They depict the different social and cultural transformations that occur in India. She reveals the insanity of the power-hungry politicians. She draws attention to the fervent liberation fighters, their sacrifices for their country, and their yearning for freedom. The personal realm of a man-woman relationship and the impersonal world of politics coexist in all of her works.

She portrays Indian political scenario before and after independence in her novels. Sahgal has so far nine novels and two autobiographies to her credit and has published a number of articles and two other books. Novels by Sahgal include *Rich Like Us* (1985), *Plans for Departure* (1987), *Mistaken Identity* (1988), *A Time to be Happy* (1957), *This Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), and *Lesser Breeds* (2003). Her autobiographical works, *From Fear Set Free* (1962) and *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954),

Both the Sahitya Academy Award and the Sinclair Fiction Prize were won by Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*. *Plans for Departure*, her previous work, was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize. From 1972 until 1975, she acted as a consultant for the English Board of Sahitya Academy. In 1977–1978, she was a part of the Varghese Committee for Autonomy to Radio & TV. She traveled to the United States with the Indian delegation in 1978. The People's Union for Civil Liberties appointed her as vice president. The Sahitya Academy Award (Britain) in 1986, the Commonwealth Writers Award (Eurasia) in 1987, and the Sinclair Prize for fiction were given to her in 1985.

Between 1981 and 1982, she was also a Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars in Washington. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences elected her as a fellow in 1990. In 1997, the University of Leeds granted her an Honorary Doctorate in Literature. Mrs. Sahgal received the Alumni Achievement Award in 2002 from the Wellesley College. In 2003, she published her last book, *Lesser Breeds*. She has twenty-four works in the Library of Congress now. From her residence in Dehra Dun, Sahgal writes and stays in touch with Woodstock. At the 75th annual Commencement of Woodstock in 2004, she gave a speech that motivated yet another group of students to change the world. Apart from a number of newspaper and magazine articles, the author has written two books: *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power* (1978) and the history book *Freedom Movement in India*.

There is a broad distribution of themes in Indian Writing in English. These books mostly dealt with social, political, and historical issues. While the literature on Indian culture, tradition, social and moral values, and Indian history that portrays Indian way of life and culture is still being studied. In India, the novel form in English experienced a moderate expansion at the beginning of the twentieth century. Social reform was a major issue in Indian English fiction.

The socio-political fiction book portrays an implied image of a location's social milieu and is typically realistic. Because it is more difficult to understand and readers are less interested in it than other books, this kind of reading is less common. It means reading a work that can be understood in multiple ways and has a variety of possible interpretations. It offers guidance on how to read correctly depending on the goal and kind of literacy employed in literary works.

The first Indian woman author of political fiction to write in English is Nayantara Sahgal. Being the product of a political family with a history of freedom fighters, she is well-suited to pen political novels. In her works, she delves into the emerging political landscape, drawing inspiration from the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and the gradual decline of Nehruism. In Indian English writing, she holds a particular place. The most conscientious and committed writer in the country is hers. She devoted herself entirely to researching the topic of challenges facing urban educated women. She talks carelessly about working women's challenges and their contributions to politics. In her previous novels, she weaves together the past of individual lives with the historical past of India to blend personal and political history. Politics is always viewed in light of its social environment. Her uncle's insights into world history had an impact on her. Her compositions developed from her political and historical awareness. Authors like Isabel Allende, Graham Greene, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez are some of her literary influences. Her book's best feature is Nehru's diplomatic foreign policy. Through a variety of political life experiences, she successfully combines the personal and the political. She highlights the humanistic principles she adheres to, and the narrative starts to focus on life quality. Her stories are warm and intimate.

Her art is grounded in realism and represents not just her own beliefs but also the evolving ideals of a society that is exposed to the pursuit of power and freedom. She attends to the social issues. Her books offer a detailed account of the intense connections and encounters she had. She is a real person, and her surroundings and her political consciousness are intrinsically linked in her literary works.

One of India's most well-known political families welcomed Nayantara Sahgal into the world on May 10, 1927 in Allahabad. India's first ambassador was her mother Vijayalakshmi Pandit, the country's first prime minister was her uncle Jawaharlal Nehru, and her first cousin was Indira Gandhi. was the first female prime minister of India and the country's third overall, therefore it is hardly surprise that politics and history influence her work. She writes a great deal. Her literary works include nine novels, two biographies, two political commentaries, and several pieces that she has contributed to different newspapers and journals. The second of Ranjit Sitaram Pandit and Vijayalakshmi Pandit's three daughters is Nayantara Sahgal. Her early years were spent in Allahabad's Anand Bhawan with her parents, her maternal uncle, Throughout her early and teenage years, she was influenced by Gandhi's beliefs of nonviolence and independence, the Indian political scene, and the fight to free India from British rule. Nayantara Sahgal writes the following in the introduction to *Prison and Chocolate Cake*;

"We grew up at a time when India was the stage for a great political drama and we shall always remain a little dazzled by the performances we have seen. In the same book, she says: Our growing up was India's growing up into political maturity — a different kind of political maturity from any the world had seen before, based on an ideology inspired by self-sacrifice, compassion and

peace."¹

The novels of Sahgal provide a true image of India both before and after independence. Among the primary themes in her works are the issues facing women in modern society and the examination of religious themes. She also frequently uses the political genre. Her works paint a realistic vision of a free India, and she is one of the country's most prominent socio-political novelists. Her works reveal that she frequently weaves her two overarching themes—social and political—together. She is the primary novelist whose social themes are grounded in legislative issues. She focuses on women's issues as the main topic against which political issues are set. Her fighting spirit and feminist concerns are evident in her fiction. In her compositions, man-woman's intimate world and the impersonal realm of politics are adjacent to each other. Among the best feminist Indian novelists writing in English is Nayantara Sahgal, whose portrayal of endearing female characters and feminist tone in her stories speak for themselves. Her works tend to explore the intricate relationships between these female characters and the political backdrop of their lives, emphasizing the experiences and challenges faced by women in this context. As T.N. Dhar rightly holds the view that;

"Sahgal's novels weave aspects of India's social, political and cultural history into their narrative framework and subject them to close critical examination"²

T.N. Dhar's perspective is apt when he suggests that Nayantara Sahgal's novels intricately interweave aspects of India's social, political, and cultural history into their narrative framework and subject them to a thorough critical examination. Sahgal skillfully merges the life stories of individuals with the broader historical context of the nation. Her works delve into and reveal the often concealed ideological underpinnings behind a politician's rhetoric, particularly when such hidden ideologies run contrary to the interests and welfare of the people

Sahgal has the interesting refinement of being the main political novelist on the Indian English literary scene. An investigation of her novels uncovers that her two overwhelming themes – social and political are constantly plaited one with the other. She is the main novelist who utilizes legislative issues as a foundation for her social themes. She takes up women's issues as the center to which the political issues frame a background, a thin frontage. Her novels manage a wide scope of themes extending from individual issues of women to the political changes that India has encountered since freedom. Cultural change in modern India can be seen in the new historical sense, containing itself a feeling for the past as well as an awareness of the future.

In her autobiographical writing and interviews Sahgal acknowledged the influence of Gandhi and Nehru. Both of them were subtly different figures though they were the key figures of Indian freedom movements.

Gandhi embraced a rural-based society and a traditional craftsmanship; the need for the easement of the oppressed groups, particularly the untouchables and women; Indian

solutions for Indian problems and a belief in national unity. These concerns were channelled through a moral faith in ahimsa -nonviolence which was part of his larger programme of satyagraha - 'the way of truth'. Nehru, was influenced by Gandhi's ideal of non-violence, laid particular emphasis upon constitutional reform and was receptive to 'western' ideas like the value of industrialization. Sahgal was deeply influenced by these personalities.

Sahgal's novel *A Situation in New Delhi* explores the Indian political landscape after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister. Sahgal creates characters in the novel who are reminiscent of real-life political figures. Shivraj is portrayed as a representation of Jawaharlal Nehru. Sahgal expresses her discontent with the current state of affairs, encompassing democratic values, the prevailing chaos in the university, and other societal issues. Sahgal elegantly weaves her theories and ideas into her chosen themes, articulating them in a language that carries substance and intellectual weight. She combines personal anecdotes with fictional elements, creating a narrative that flows smoothly and captivates the reader.

"They hadn't known, when they asked her to join... though how it could have escaped them was ironic...that she had a mind of her own and in a position of authority she would use it. Wasn't that what authority was for?"³

It provides a glimpse into the themes of the novel, including political leadership, religious diversity, and the impact of a charismatic leader like Shivraj on the country's politics and society. It also highlights the challenges and moral dilemmas faced by characters in the post-Shivraj era.

It interprets the consequences of a well liked Prime Minister Shivraj, who governed the political and national scene for a decade. He was the one who sacrificed for the freedom of India. It's a factual based novel which has political dislocation on the level of the novelist's own life. This novel points out the Naxalite movement and student unrest after the death of Nehru which further results in alienation and frustration of the younger generation of Indians. The novel begins with the news of the death of Prime Minister Shivraj, the idealistic and charismatic leader of India. In the novel, the private world and the political world are simultaneously treated in which actions and characters are blended.

This Time of Morning is a political novel, which deals with the happenings in the corridors of power in Parliament. The characters in this novel are portrayed symbolically. Much of the action takes place in Delhi, and the particular context is the decline and fall of one of the pillars of the Government. Kailas recalls the early days of his political career, marked by his involvement in the non-cooperation movement and numerous stints in jail. Despite those hardships, Kailas found a sense of purpose and inner peace. However, he now grapples with the feeling of displacement as a politician cut off from the mainstream of events, as he attempts to write a book he has always wanted to write. This introspection underscores the evolution and challenges faced by political leaders in a

changing post-independence India.

"we are on the threshold of something so big, its directions so important for the future of this country. That my mind reels when I try to assess this size and this importance."⁴

Kailas believes that quality should be the paramount criterion for selecting candidates. He argues that simply seeking votes and majorities, as advocated by Somanth, is not sufficient; the focus should be on the candidates' competence, capabilities, and their potential to be effective leaders.

The Day in Shadow explores the existential situation of its characters, particularly within the backdrop of daily life in Delhi. The characters represent various social types, including political figures, business leaders, bureaucrats, and intellectuals. It alludes to the significance of the time period in which the story is set, indicating that it plays a pivotal role in shaping the characters' actions and interactions. This momentous time seems to be tied to the post-independence era of modern India, marking a critical point in the nation's history as it stands at a crossroads of progress.

"It was time for a similar revolution to occur here, time to cast aside sentiment and the weak, worn-out liberalism of the past, time to bury Gandhi and inscribe a new chapter in Indian history. The old connections should be consigned to the garbage can. The entire sentimental framework of Parliament and the Constitution must be discarded."⁵

Sumer Singh is swiftly rewarded with a promotion to the rank of a Cabinet Minister, tasked with overseeing Foreign Affairs. Som, on the other hand, remains characteristically forthright.

Storm in Chandigarh (1969) reveals the problem of political tension and violence originated in Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states - the Punjab and Haryana. The novel reveals violence and chaos in political situation after the partition of Punjab into two newly formed states - Punjabi - speaking Punjab and Hindi - speaking Haryana with Chandigarh as the common capital. The novel reveals with the political turmoil in Punjab.

Sahgal's exploration of the prevalence of social hypocrisy and political pretense in modern India is sharp, akin to a surgeon's scalpel, yet it is infused with compassion and love. Her analysis and interpretation of the human condition are marked by fresh and profound insights into the human psyche. Sahgal skillfully maintains the aesthetic distance and balance between the outward reality reflected in society and the inner reality concealed in artistic sensibility. She traverses the path from restlessness to tranquility and from rootlessness to rootedness, skillfully avoiding the pitfalls of melodrama and propaganda along the way. Her work celebrates life and reaffirms her commitment to the fundamental value of freedom and an enduring vision. Sahgal effectively portrays the diversity of influence and life intentions among these characters in New Delhi, which serves as the backbone of modern India. The novel provides a rich tapestry of characters and their interconnected lives, offering

insight into the complexities of the society and politics of the time.

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